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The origin and development of the art of oral interpretation of verse in the United States

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THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ART OF ORAL INTERPRETATION OF VERSE IN THE UNITED STATES

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

...For just as a skilled musician is needed to interpret the composer's symbols, so good oral reading is required to interpret the poet's thought and emotion. The potentialities, so to speak, of the printed poem must be vocally realized....Shakespere, for example, did not write for the eye, but for the ear.

Edwin Dubois Shurter and Dwight Evert Watkins, Poems for Oral Interpretation (New York: Noble and Noble, 1925, p. iii.

CHAPTER I

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem.

The main purpose of this study is to present the origin and the development of the art of oral interpretation of verse in the United States. During the past 150 years there have been changes taking place in the philosophy behind the art of oral interpretation of verse; during that 150 years the type of poetry presented for oral interpretation has changed; the aims of oral interpretation have changed and the rules for oral reading of verse have been modified, altered, and changed. This study presents these changes and their development, so as to give a history of the art of oral interpretation of verse in the United States. In presenting such a historical analysis of the development of the art of oral interpretation of verse, three principle factors regarding oral interpretation will be the basic considerations of this study:

1. The subject matter and types of verse presented for oral interpretation.
2. The rules for the oral interpretation of verse.
3. The philosophy and aims of the art of oral interpretation of verse.

The Need

Historical studies have been made in other fields of speech, such as drama and oratory; and various books have delt with the techniques of poetry, but have ignored the techniques of oral interpretation of verse. The historical aspect to the oral interpretation of verse has remained untouched and yet, it too has its history.

Several prominent individuals in the field of speech have pointed out the need for an historical study in the field of oral interpretation. Wallace Bacon of the School of Speech at Northwestern University states, "...interpretation is still badly in need of historical studies which will make clear the line of development which oral reading has followed."[1]

William Parrish has observed the need for this type of historical study and has pointed out:

> ....of the various courses commonly included in departments of Speech, it will be generally conceded that the course in Interpretative Reading is the most difficult to organize. Its content is so elusive, and the skill it aims to impart so narrowly focused, that it offers no obvious point of beginning or method of procedure. The problem is further complicated by the lack of any

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[1]Wallace A. Bacon, "Graduate Studies in Interpretation," Quarterly Journal of Speech, April, 1949, p. 316.

> helpful tradition such as comes to one's aid in organizing a course in Public Speaking, or a body of scientific data such as is available for use in a course in Voice and Phonetics, or Argumentation. Interpretative activity is from its very nature almost incapable of scientific treatment, either philological or experimental, since an artistic interpretation, like a piece of good acting, ceases to exist at the moment of its creation. Interpretation has no such great tradition as dignifies and methodizes the study of oratory or acting. It has had no Burke or Cicero no Garrick or Duse, no such great systematizer as Aristotle or Bacon. Perhaps it is for these reasons that it suffered so in earlier times from the vagaries and vulgarities of elocutionists, who did much to make public recitation a thing, says John Masefield, "that strong men flee from screaming."[2]

Lee Emersen Bassett, in a letter to the writer points out that much remains to be done in regard to the historical development of oral interpretation of verse. He writes:

Dear Mr. Bosmajian:

"The Origin and Growth of Oral Interpretation of Poetry in the United States" is a good topic for a thesis. I am not surprised, though, to know that you have found scant pickings, particularly in books on Elocution published before 1900. More recent texts give some attention to the matter, but, as you have no doubt learned, much remains to be done.

Early texts as far back as 1825 and right up to 1900, and even later, include much good poetry, not only excerpts for vocal practice but whole poems for reading aloud. With the exception of one book, Ebineezer

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[2]William Parrish, "Interpretative Reading," Quarterly Journal of Speech, April, 1927, p. 160.

Porter's "The Rhetorical Reader" (1838), little or nothing is said in any of them I happen to know about of the problems of the oral reading of verse. Porter devoted three pages to general suggestings regarding verse reading. All the others, so far as I know them, are concerned with elements of delivery--gesture, pitch, time, range, volume and other expressive modulations of the voice--applied to the delivery of orations, literary prose and poetry alike, giving no attention to the special demands of poetic forms. The qualities of verse that make it verse--rhythm, rhyme, line length, tempo, assonance, melody, imagery of sounds, etc.--are ignored. On the other hand, various books on poetry, "The Study of Poetry," "The Forms of Poetry," "The Enjoyment of Poetry," and the rest, deal with techniques of poetry but ignore the techniques of oral interpretation of verse, though oral reading is implied in every one of them. There is a bad lapse here.

Without knowledge of the elements of verse form nobody can do full justice to a poem in reading it aloud. On the other hand, I am convinced that the beauty and power of poetry cannot be fully realized or felt without the adequate oral rendering of it. The musical qualities of poetry, as of music itself, are not addressed to the eye. We cannot see its rhythm, its "concord of sweet sounds" nor its melody. Here is where books on Elocution missed the boat so far as the interpretation of poetry is concerned.

If you will look through early school readers, you will find a lot of good poetry but not much about what to look for or how to read it. McGuffey's Reader (1866) mentions "poetic pauses"--end-line suspense and caesural pause--but that is all. Appleton's Fifth reader, (American Book Co. (1878) the one I used in school as a boy, has three articles (17 pages in all) on Poetic Reading by Mark Bailey. This is the only early textbook I know of that gave particular attention to things to be observed in reading poetry aloud. Who Mark Bailey was I don't know. In connection with your study you might find it worth while to look him up.

Are you acquainted with Dr. Hiram Corson's little book, "The Aims of Literary Study," (1916) and "The Voice and Spiritual Education," (1914)? They are out of print now, I guess, but they would be helpful to you, I think.

A recent book, "Speech Quality and Interpretation," by Jane Henerdeen, (Parpers, 1946) approaches the study

of poetry for interpretation in a non-technical way that is interesting and stimulating. I mention this particular book because it is less known, possibly, than other texts on oral interpretation that have appeared during the last twenty years.

If you have not already visited the State Library at Sacramento, you should do so. It is likely that you will find some interesting old books there.

With all good wishes for success in your undertaking, I am

Yours sincerely,

Lee Emerson Bassett
(Professor Emeritus)

With this need in mind, a study of the development of the oral interpretation of verse in the United States is presented here.

Delimitations

The reader may find that muchhas been left out (and much has). The explanation is that the inclusion of the vast limbo of selections for oral interpretation and the rules for reading aloud would carry this study on ad infinitum. Again, if this study were not limited to the history of the art of oral interpretation of verse, and verse alone, the particular subject could not be treated as specifically as it has been. Within this study there shall appear aspects of oral interpretation, such as elocution, oral interpretation of prose selections, and various Schools of expression, which would merit separate studies. For a more complete study, this paper is limited to the historical development of the art of oral interpretation of verse in the United States.

CHAPTER II

EARLY RULES AND AIMS FOR READING ALOUD

The term 'oral interpretation of verse' is a fairly recent term used to describe the vocal expression of verse. That is, it is recent in relation to the history of the art of the interpretive reading of verse in the United States. What is known today as oral interpretation was in 1787 known as the Art of Reading.

Noah Webster Jr. presented rules for Reading in his American Selections of 1787:

> Rule I--Let your articulation be clear and distinct. A good articulation consists of giving every letter and syllable its proper pronunciation of sound. Let each syllable and the letters which compose it, be pronounced with a clear voice, without whining, drawling, lisping, stammering, mumbling in the throat or speaking through the nose. Avoid equally a dull, drawling habit, and too much rapidity of pronunciation; for each of these faults destroys a distinct articulation.
>
> Rule II--Observe stops and mark the proper pauses, but make no pause where the sense requires none.
>
> Rule III--Pay strictest attention to accent, emphasis and cadence. Let accented syllables be pronounced with a proper stress of voice, the unaccented with little stress of voice, but distinctly. The important words of a sentence, which I call naturally emphatical, have a claim to a considerable force of voice; but particulars, such as, of, to, as, and, etc. require no force of utterance, unless they happen to be emphatical, which is rarely the case. No person can read or speak well unless he understands what he reads; and the sense will always determine what words are emphatical. It is a matter of the highest

> consequence, therefore, that a speaker should clearly comprehend the meaning of what he delivers that he may know where to lay emphasis.[3]

The quotation is interrupted at this point to bring to the attention of the reader the last two sentences. The ideas expressed by Webster in 1787, that the meaning is of highest consequence when reading verse aloud and that the sense of the selection will determine the points of emphasis, are not so recent as believed by many. For instance, Samuel Silas Curry (1847-1921) is often attributed with having introduced the emphasis of meaning to the oral interpretation field, yet as early as 1787 the same idea is presented by Noah Webster Jr.

Continuing with the quotation;

> Rule IV--Let the sentiments you express be accompanied with proper tones, looks, and gestures. By tone I mean the various modulations of voice by which we naturally express the emotions and passions. By looks I mean the expression of the emotions and passions in the countenance. Gestures are the various motions of the hands or body, which the speaker designs to express.
>
> All these should be perfectly natural. They should be the same which we use in common conversation. A speaker should endeavor to feel what he speaks; for the perfection of reading and speaking is to pronounce the words as if they sentiments were our own.....
>
> The whole art of reading and speaking--all the rules of eloquence may be comprised in this concise direction: Let the reader or speaker express every word as if the

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[3]Noah Webster Jr., American Selections (Philadelphia: Young and M'Culloch, 1787), pp. 13-15

sentiment were his own.[4]

It is to be realized here, that what has been assumed by many, that the desireability for 'naturalness' in reading verse aloud is a fairly recent conception, was considered by Webster in 1787 as the prerequisite for good oral reading. Thus, to this point two aspects of reading verse have been brought forth--first, the emphasizing of meaning and sense; second, naturalness in the reading of verse. Both ideas are prevalent in the field of oral interpretation today and both ideas were presented to readers one hundred and fifty years ago.

Then Webster proceeds to give more specific directions for expressing certain passions and sentiments:

> Pity draws down the eyebrows, opens the mouth, and draws together the features.
>
> Grief is expressed by weeping, stamping with feet, lifting up the eyes to heaven.
>
> Fear opens the eyes and the mouth, shortenes the nose, draws down the eyebrows, gives the countenance an air of wildness; the face becomes pale, the elbows are drawn back parallel with the sides, one foot is drawn back, the heart beats violently, the breath is quick, the voice weak and trembling sometimes it produces shrieks and fainting.
>
> Remorse casts down the countenance, and clouds it with anxiety. Sometimes the teeth gnash and the right hand beats the breast.
>
> Malice sets the jaws, or gnashes with the teeth; sends flashes with the eyes, draws the mouth down towards the ears, clenches the fist and bends the elbows.[5]

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4 Ibid., pp. 16-17

5 Ibid., p. 18

Just exactly how Webster resolved the foregoing rules for expression for certain passions and sentiments with his 'natural' approach to reading aloud is not seen. The ideas of naturalness in reading verse and emphasis on meaning were carried on by Lindley Murray in 1809 in his

THE ENGLISH READER

or
Pieces in Prose and Poetry,
Selected From
The Best Writers
Designed To Assist Young Persons
To Read With Propriety And Effect,
And To Inculcate
Some Of The Most Important Principles Of
Piety And Virtue
With A Few Preliminary Observations
On The Principles Of Good Reading

By Lindley Murray

New York: Collins and Perkins 1809

In regard to the aims of the Oral Reading of verse, Murray stated in the preface of the above mentioned book:

> The present work, as the title expresses, aims at the attainment of three objects: To improve youth in the art of reading; to meliorate their language and sentiments; and to inculcate some of the most important principles of piety and virtue. The pieces selected, not only give exercise to a great variety of emotions and the correspondent tones and variations of voice, but contain sentences and members of sentences, which are diversified, proportioned, and pointed with accuracy. Exercises of this nature are, it is presumed, well calculated to teach youth to read with propriety and effort. A

> selection of sentences, in which variety and proportion, with exact punctuation, have been carefully observed, in all their parts as with respect to one another, will probably have a much greater effect, in properly teaching the art of reading, than is commonly imagined. On such constructions, everything is accommodated to the understanding and the voice; and the common difficulties in learning to read well, are obviated.[6]

The following observations on the principles of good reading, written in 1809, are not any different from the principles of oral interpretation of verse as presented today.

> To read with propriety is a pleasing and important attainment; productive of improvement both to the understanding and the heart. It is essential to a complete reader that he minutely perceive the ideas, and enter into the feelings of the author, whose sentiments he professes to repeat: for how is it possible to represent clearly to others, what we have but faint or inaccurate conceptions of ourselves? If there were no other benefits resulting from the art of reading well, than the necessity it lays us under, of precisely ascertaining the meaning of what we read; and the habit thence acquired, of doing this with facility, both when reading silently and aloud, they would constitute a sufficient compensation for all labour we can bestow upon the subject.....
>
> To give rules for the management of the voice in reading, by which the necessary pauses, emphasis and tones, may be discovered and put in practice, is not possible.[7]

The foregoing was written in 1809 and not 1929 or 1949.

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[6]Lindley Murray, The English Reader (New York: Collins and Perkins, 1809) preface.

[7]Ibid., p. vii

The same observations to be watched for in oral interpretation today were presented by Murray in his Reader in 1809: "Proper Loudness of Voice; Distinctness; Slowness; Emphasis Tones; Pauses; and the mode of Reading Verse."[8] The aim of focusing one's attention to the meaning of the verse for oral interpretation, so it is seen, is nothing new. Neither is the idea of naturalness in reading verse. The points to be watched for in reading verse aloud as given by Murray are those the reader of today is quite aware of.

However, the mechanical elocutionary approach to the oral reading of verse as forwarded by the elocutionists of the eighteen hundreds took command of the reading and recitation books and programs. It is to be noted that even though the elocutionary approach to verse reading prevailed, the school of naturalness and emphasis on meaning was somewhat alive; perhaps, in a dormant state.

In with the elocutionists came their reading rules which went on and on "ad nauseam." A Fifth Reader printed in 1861 poured forth the following rules and modifications to the rules:

> Rule 1.--Direct questions, or those that can be answered by yes or no, generally require the rising inflection, and their answers the falling.

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[8]Ibid., p. viii

Modifications of Rule 1.

Note 1.--Answers that are given in a careless or indifferent manner, or in a tone of slight disrespect, take the rising inflection in all cases.

Note 2.--Direct questions, when they have the nature of an appeal, or are spoken in an exclamatory manner, take the falling inflection. In these cases the voice often falls below the general pitch, contrary to the general rule for the falling inflection.

Note 3.--When a direct question is not understood, and is repeated with emphasis, the repeated question takes the falling inflection.

Rule II.--The pause of suspension, denoting that the sense is unfinished, such as a succession of particulars that are not emphatic, cases of direct address, sentences implying condition, the case absolute, etc., generally requires the rising inflection.

Note.--For cases in which emphatic succession of particulars modifies this rule, see Rule VIII.

Rule III.--Indirect questions, or those which cannot be answered by yes or no, generally require the falling inflection, and their answers the same.

Rule IV.--A completion of the sense, whether at the close or any other part of the sentence, requires the falling inflection.

Note.--But when strong emphasis, with the falling inflection, comes near the close of a sentence, the voice often takes the rising inflection at the close.

Rule V.--Words and clauses connected by the disjunctive or generally require the rising inflection before the disjunctive, and the falling after it. Where several words are thus connected in the same clause, the rising inflection is given to all except the last.

Note 1.--When the disjunctive or is made emphatic, with the falling inflection, it is followed by the rising inflection, in accordance with the note to Rule IV.

Note 2.--When or is used conjunctively, as no contrast is denoted by it, it requires the falling inflection after as well as before it, except when the clause or sentence expresses a completion of the sense.

Rule VI.--When negation is opposed to affirmation, the former takes the rising and the latter the falling inflection, in whatever order they occur. Comparison and contrast (anthithesis) come under the same head.

Note 1.--Negative sentences which imply a continuance of thought, although they may not be opposed to affirmation, frequently close with the rising inflection.

Note 2.--When, in contrasted sentences, negation is attended with deep and calm feeling, it requires the falling inflection.....

Rule IX.--Expressions of tender emotion, such as grief, pity, kindness, gentle joy, a gentle appeal, gentle entreaty or expostulation, etc., commonly require a gentle rising inflection.

Rule X.--Expressions of strong emotion, such as the language of exclamation (not designed as a question), authority, surprise, distress, denunciation, lamentation, earnest entreaty, command, reproach, terror, anger, hatred, envy, revenge, etc., and strong affirmation, require the falling inflection.....[9]

These rules were usually followed by examples.

For instance,

Example for Rule IX:

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[9]Willson, Marcius, The Fifth Reader (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1861), pp. 12-17.

> My mother! when I learned that thou was dead,
> Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
> Hovered thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son
> Wretch even then, life's journey just begun?
>
> I would not live alway; I ask not to stay,
> Where storm after storm rises dark o'er the way;
> I would not live alway, thus fettered by sin;
> Temptation without, and corruption within;--

These types of rules prevailed in the various elocutionary schools. A very typical example of the type of recitation--that is, what poems were read and the rules for reading them aloud--of the elocutionists was that of the Cumnock School, of which Robert McLain Cumnock was the leader. In his Choice Readings Cumnock presents several types of readings.

> The elocutionary suggestions will appear as introductions to the various classes of selections in their various classes of selections in their respective orders:
>
> First--Pathos
>
> Second--Solemnity
>
> Third--Serenity, Beauty, Love
>
> Fourth--Common Reading, Narritive, and Didactic
>
> Fifth--Gayety
>
> Sixth--Humor
>
> Seventh--Grand, Sublime, and Reverntial Styles
>
> Eighth--Oratorical
>
> Ninth--Abrupt and Startling
>
> Tenth--Miscellaneous Selections

> In each class of selections an endeavor has been made to secure just as pleasing and effective pieces as though the choice were unrestricted, and, at the same time, the importance of choosing pieces that would serve as types of the sentiment or passion they were intended to illustrate, has been duly considered. The Compiler acknowledges with thanks, the kind permission of Messrs. J. R. Osgood and Co., Hurd and Houghton, and D. Appleton and Co., to use the poems of Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, Cary, Bryant, etc., that are in this volume, and of which they hold the copywrite.[10]

Then Cummock proceeds to give poetic selections forwarded with rules regarding the reading of them. The proper rendition of all pieces of pure pathos, demands chiefly three conditions:

> First, Natural voice.
>
> Second, Effusive utterance.
>
> Third, Slide of semitone.

> First.--By natural voice we mean the conversational voice, or the voice we all have by nature. Great care should be taken to secure the purest tone, free from all nasal, guttural and pectoral qualities of voice. A clear, pleasant and musical tone is indispensable in securing the best effects.
>
> Second.--The utterance must be effusive, i.e., flowing from the mouth in a continuous stream of sound. If a staccato or commonplace style of utterance is indulged in, the reading will necessarily degenerate into mere talk, and crush out all sympathetic feeling.[11]

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[10]Robert McLain Cummock, Choice Readings (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Co., 1882) preface.

[11]Ibid., p. 13.

The foregoing conditions apply to the two following selections which Cumnock uses for pathetic examples:

WE WATCHED HER BREATHING

We watched her breathing through the night,
Her breathing soft and low,
As in her breast the wave of life
Kept heaving to and fro.

So silently we seemed to speak,
So slowly moved about,
As we had lent her half our powers
To eke her live out.

Our very hopes belied our fears,
Our fears our hopes belied,--
We thought her dying when she slept,
And sleeping when she died.

For when the morn came dim and sad,
And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed,--she had
Another morn than ours.

Thomas Hood[12]

A DEATH-BED

Her suffering ended with the day;
Yet lived she at its close,
And breathed the long, long night away
In statue-like repose.

But when the sun, in all his state,
Illumed the eastern skies,
She passed through glory's morning-gate,
And walked in Paradise!

James Aldrich[13]

Turning away from the pathetic style, Cumnock focuses his attention to selections which require a gay style. Regarding gayety Cumnock says,

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[12] Ibid., p. 29

[13] Ibid., p. 28

In this class of selections the same suggestions that were made on the subject of common reading are pertinent and practical. However, greater variety of intonation, quicker movement, and a higher pitch, are required in gay and lively styles. Flexibility of voice is indispensable; so that the slides of the fifth and octave may be easily reached, while the voice remains free from strain and harshness.

CUPID SWALLOWED

T' other day, as I was twining
Roses for a crown to dine in,
What, of all things, midst the heap,
Should I light on, fast asleep,
But the little desparate elf,--
The tiny traitor,--Love himself!
By the wings I pitched him up
Like a bee, and in a cup
Of my wine I plunged and sank him;
And what d' ye think I did?--I drank him!
Faith, I thought him dead. Not he!
There he lives with tenfold glee;
And now this moment, with his wings,
I feel him tickling my heart-strings.[14]

When Cumnock reaches the grand, sublime, and revential styles of reading verse he goes into a discussion of a spcial type of voice to be used--Orotund Voice. This voice is to be used in reading the selections which are sublime, grand or revential. He writes of his Orotund Voice:

The Orotund voice, or the voice that is used in the expression of impassioned selections, needs now to be specially considered, as we are about to treat of various classes of composition that depend upon that voice for their appropriate interpretation.

What is the Orotund voice, and wherein does it differ from the natural or conversational

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[14]Ibid., p. 127

voice? These questions are pertinent to the present discussion.

The Natural and Orotund voices are manufactured in the same way, and differ only in their intensity and volume of sound. If a drum head be tapped by the finger a feeble-report is heard; but if you beat the drum with great force a very much louder report follows each blow, and a consequent resonance is heard inside as the sound passes from one head of the drum to the other. So with these voices. In the case of the Natural voice the sound made in the glottis, as we talk, is not sufficiently loud to produce any resonance, except a slight one in the head; but when by the action of the abdominal muscles, the air in the lungs is thrown into the glottis with great force, a loud explosion of sound is heard, and a consequence resonance takes place in the cavities of the body, especially the chest; hence the term, chest tone.

The most direct answer that we can make to the inquiry, what is the Orotund voice and wherein does it differ from the Natural voice, is this. The Orotund voice is that full, deep and resonant sound heard in all impassioned sublimity, oratory and fierce emotion, and it differs specifically from the Natural voice in that its depth, fullness and roundness arise chiefly from resonance in the cavities of the body.

The use of the Orotund voice in impassioned styles is so common a thing in ordinary life that the mention of a single example may serve to dissipate the absurd notion that elocutionary rules are arbitrary and conventional. For example, when a boy loses a finger he does not talk, he roars: he has so much feeling to get rid of that he cannot find vent in the Natural voice, and is forced by an irresistable impulse to use a larger voice in order that he may find relief. You can read an essay, but you must speak an oration. The emotion that fills the Orator's soul as he denounces an enemy, or excites his countrymen to heroic deeds, must find an outlet in the full strong and ample tones of the Orotund.

> There are three kinds of Orotund voice, the Effusive, Expulsive and Explosive, each of which will receive a separate consideration.[15]

It is evident that the intellectual aspect, that is the meaning, thought, and sense, was not stressed by the elocutionists. Not only did their rules for reading verse show us this, but also the very selections chosen for readings and recitations were packed with emotional sentimentality and pathos. During this period several compilations were published and available for those who wished to take part in the oral recitation of verse. One such compilation was Werner's Readings and Recitations in which there appeared this preface:

> The purpose of this collection is to offer readings that can be approved by refined taste and cultivated judgement. The opinion has, to a certain extent, obtained that highly-wrought, sensational elocutionary selections are alone likely to insure attention.
>
> Werner's Readings and Recitations is designed to elevate the student's thought and inspire him with admiration for the purer forms of English literature; also to awaken careful, analytic study. In order to do this the observance of a few direct principles is necessary, even if the intention be to do nothing more than acquire the utterance, in an unembellished manner, of an author's productions in prose and verse.
>
> The subject should first be clearly defined in the reader's mind by silent, thoughtful conning of the selection, determining it as narrative, descriptive, dedactic, heroic, pathetic, or humorous. Then should follow a clear understanding of the manner in which to deliver the style decided upon; this involves

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[15]Ibid., pp. 225-226

> a ready perception of types drawn from daily observation of character. Tones, action, facial expression, and a subordinating of personality to the requirements of the moment are aids by which are to be communicated to an audience the inner significance of what is read, recited, or declaimed.[16]

Werner's selections 'to elevate the student's thought and inspire him with admiration for the purer forms of English literature' were full of sensational sentimentality and pathetic pathos.

LITTLE BLUE RIBBONS

"Little Blue Ribbons!" We call her that
From the ribbons she wears in her favorite hat;
For may not a person be only five,
And yet have the neatest of taste alive?
As a matter of fact, this one has views
Of the strictest sort as to frocks and shoes;
And we never object to a sash or bow,
When "Little Blue Ribbons" prefers it so.

"Little Blue Ribbons" has eyes of blue,
And an arch little mouth, when the teeth peep through;
And her primitive look is wise and grave,
With a sense of the weight of the word "behave;"
Though now and again she may condescend
To a radiant smile for a private friend;
But to smile forever is weak, you know,
And "Little Blue Ribbons" regards it so.

She's a staid little woman! And so as well
Is her layship's doll, "Miss Bonnibelle;"
But I think what at present the most takes up
The thoughts of her heart is her last new cup;
For the object thereon--be it understood--
Is the "Robin that buried the "Babes in the Wood.'"
It is not in the least like a robin, though,
But "Little Blue Ribbons" declares it so.

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16 Werner's Readings and Recitations, (New York: Edgar S. Werner & Co., 1890) preface

"Little Blue Ribbons" believes, I think,
That the rain comes down for the birds to
drink;
Moreover, she holds, in a cab you'd get
To the spot where the suns of yesterday set;
And I know that she fully expects to meet
With a lion or wolf in Regent Street!
We may smile, and deny as we like--but no;

Dear "Little Blue Ribbons". She tells us all
That she never intends to be "great" and "tall;"
For how could she ever contrive to sit
In her "own, own chair," if she grew one bit!
And, further, she says she intends to stay
In her "darling home" till she gets "quite
gray;"
Alas! and alas! yet we doubt, you know,
But "Little Blue Ribbons" will have it so!
Austin Dobson[17]

THE MODEST MAID

"He told me," said the modest maid,
"I was the pearl of pearls;
My charms displayed would overshade
Ten thousand other girls,
He vowed I was his cherished prize,
His goddess, his delight;
He praised my eyes more blue than the skies,
Their glance than gems more bright.

"He swore gold glittered in my hair,
No words could tell my worth;
He called me fair beyond compare
With anything on earth."
"And trust you," asked the matron wise,
"In what he says to you?"
From the maid's eyes shone sweet surprise;
"Of course! I know it's true."
A. H. Morris[18]

Thousands of such verses "cluttered" the recitation books which described the verse included with such

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[17] Werner's Readings and Recitations No. 1, (New York: Edgar S. Werner & Co., 1890) p. 232.

[18] Werner's Readings and Recitations No. 9, (New York: Edgar S. Werner & Co., 1892) p. 177.

adjectives as 'heroic,' 'pathetic', 'intensely dramatic and pathetic', 'pleasing', 'humorous', 'touching', 'eloquent', 'vivacious', 'rustic', 'patriotic', etc. Another such accummulation of verse for reading aloud was that of J. W. Shoemaker. His Best Selections carried page upon page of all such verse suited for those who wished to display their elocutionary talents in "bellowing" and gesturing. Shoemaker presented his rules for reading aloud as did Cumnock and Werner. Shoemaker's rules for correct reading and recitation were as elaborate and mechanical as those presented by other elocutionists who were interested in transmitting the sentiments and feelings of man through elocutionary methods.[19] Scrap Book Recitation Series No. 2 presented such verse as the following for oral interpretation:

Only A Glass of Cider
Mrs. E. J. Richmond

It is only a glass of cider,
From the hands of a fair young girl!
How could he decline the kindness?
She would deem him a mannerless churl.

It is only a glass of cider,
But it kindled anew the flame
Which had burned his noble manhood,
And left him in grief and shame.

He had broken away from the tempter,
He stood on the rock again,
No longer the penniless drunkard--
He stood a man among men.

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19 J. W. Shoemaker, Practical Elocution, (Philadelphia: J. W. Shoemaker & Co., 1878) pp. 23-29.

When "only a glass of cider"
Threw open the gates again
To a pathway of pain and sorrow,
To a death of hopeless pain.[20]

William Parrish refers to these recitation books in saying"....and let us leave the whole mass of third rate 'literature' that clutters the recitation books, with all its sentimental absurdity and maudlin pathos, to the limbo of mediocracy where it properly belongs...[21]

In his book, American Poetry 1671-1928, Conrad Aiken "has tried to eliminate, as far as possible, those things which embody the faults which so cursed American poetry in the nineteenth century--excessive sentimentality, sententiousness, easy dactylic exoticism--in order that the present movement in American poetry towards severer outline, both in idea and expression, might be more visible."[22]

The following stanza and the rules for reading it may act as concluding examples of the elocutionary school:

And why? Oh, world, I ask you why
That flag up there in the blue sky,
That floats half-mast for men, who have
Perchance no laurels for their grave;
The flag for which my grandsires died
Which was my honored mother's pride,

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20 Henry M. Soper, Scrap Book Recitation Series No. 2, (Chicago: T. S. Denison & Co. 1880) p. 129.

21 William Parrish "Interpretive Reading," Quarterly Journal of Speech, April, 1927, p. 168.

22 Conrad Aiken, American Poetry 1671-1928, (New York: Modern Library, 1929) preface.

That gives its pledge of grief to-day,
Should not, when I shall pass away--
My work all done, my prayers all said,
Why not half-mast when I am dead?

Give emphatic falling inflection on "why," "Oh, world" is parinthetic, but receives full force of expression, the voice rising upon "Oh" and falling with distinct emphasis upon "world." "You" is given with falling wave, and "why" with the rising and followed by a rhetorical pause. The second line is given with quick movement, the slight emphatic strokes being given to "flag, up, there, in, blue, sky." Commence third line slower, pause after "floats;" give lesser emphasis on "half-mast." and much stronger on "men." "Perchance," in the fourth line, is parenthetic; "laurels" is made emphatic by the falling wave of a third, while "grave" is given the rising wave of a third; staccato movement on "The flag for which my grandsires died, which was my honored mother's pride," with emphasis on "grandsires" and "died," and rising wave of a fifth on "honored" and falling on "mother's." Speak this last word tenderly, almost sacredly. Emphasize "I;" give "work" and "all" with rising voice, and "done" with falling, pausing for rhetorical effect briefly after "all;" "prayers" is spoken slowly and devoutely, with falling wave on "prayers" and "all," and rising on "said." Ask the question in the last line with intensity, emphasizing "not" and coloring the last four words with pathos.[23]

It was such approaches as this that made oral interpretation a thing "that strong men flee from screaming.[24] However, the elocutionists were soon to loose their influence in the field of oral interpretation of verse.

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[23] Werner's Readings and Recitations No. 30, (New York: Edgar S. Werner & Co., 1888) p. 22

[24] William Parrish, "Interpretative Reading," Quarterly Journal of Speech, April 1927, p. 160.

CHAPTER III

MEANING AND NATURALNESS ENTER VERSE INTERPRETATION

Although the over-emotional, over-gestured, over-sentimental, and over-pathetic type of readings prevailed during the nineteenth century, it must be remembered that there remained those individuals who were of the natural and 'think-the-thought' school of expression. Those of this school considered the oral interpretation of verse "an effect as natural as the blooming of a rose and as spontaneous as the song of the bird, to improve it requires primarily the stimulation of its mental cause. Hence, it is necessary first to develop the actions of the mind which directly produce modulations of voice or their natural signs."[25]

One of the earlier men to give vent to the ideas of this school of expression was Mark Bailey (1822-1904). In his introductory treatise on elocution he wrote:

> Elocution is the vocal expression of ideas with the speaking tones, as distinguished from the singing.
>
> Good elocution, in reading or speaking, is the expression of ideas with their appropriate or natural speaking tones of the voice.

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[25] S. S. Curry, Foundations of Expression, (Boston: The Expression Company, 1920) p. 12.

> But how can we, intelligently, even attempt to give correct vocal expression to what is not first clearly understood and appreciated?
>
> Hence arised at the very outset, as a prerequisite to any possible excellence in elocution, the necessity of a thorough analysis and study of the ideas or the thoughts and feeling to be read.
>
> Let, then, each lesson in reading begin with this preparatory work of 'logical analysis'."[26]

Bailey could be considered ahead of his time when he wrote the treatise; and he was a lone voice being outshouted by the mechanical elocutionists who had control of the interpretation field at the time Baily wrote his treatise on elocution. In 1863, when Curry was yet a young man, Bailey wrote:

> Good reading of Poetry demands, in addition to the elements of elocution which belong to all emotional expression, as such, that just enough special attention be given to quantity and accent to fill out the time equably in each 'bar' of the poetical 'measure' and mark its rhythm perciptibly. In good poetry the rhythm always harmonizes with the sense and spirit, so that the rhythmical accent falls naturally just where emphatic force is needed to give the author's true meaning. The relative degree of force which should mark the rhythm, agrees with the relative or emphatic force with which the ideas should be read.
>
> It is better, therefore, to study and read poetry as emotional prose, without any thought of poetical measure, than to fall into the greater fault of marking the metre too prominently and mechanically, with an offensive 'sing-song' or scanning.
>
> The aim should be to mark the poetical measure but delicately, so that we may perceive, if we choose to think of it, that the reader is giving it happily, but not so that we must think of its mechanical structure instead of the worth

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[26] G. S. Hillard, Sixth Reader (Boston: Brewer and Tileston, 1866), p. xviii.

> of the ideas. Poetical rhythm and quantity belong not so much to the form as to the spirit of poetry, for they are essential elements in the natural expression of all beautiful and tender and noble sentiments, whether in verse or prose.[27]

By 1883 the battle had begun between those who offered verse readings "that offered fine chances for emotional wallowing and pretense for vocality and gesture"[28] and those who considered interpretation of verse more of a mental process than did the elocutionists. Mark Bailey did much to promote the cause of those who considered the oral interpretation of verse more than a process of overdone facial expression, overdone gesturing, and overemphasized vocal tones.

In The Fifth Reader Bailey wrote in 1883:

> Poetry is the union of speech and music. It combines the logical worth of prose with the metric form of song; and though the logical part may predominate in some poems, and the musical in others yet, in all the best poetry, these two elements blend in perfect harmony.
>
> No Reading is tolerable which habitually violates either the sense or the measure. For if the meter alone is marked, without regard to the thoughts, the reading becomes senseless 'sing-song'; and if the ideas are given with no observance of the measure, poetry is degraded to mere prose.
>
> Good reading, then, must give the meaning and the measure in unison, so far as the poet has harmonized them.

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[27] Ibid., p. xxviii

[28] L. E. Bassett, "Adapting Courses In Interpretation to the Academic Mind," Quarterly Journal of Speech, April, 1932, p. 175.

> Now, that part of poetry which it possesses in common with prose--viz., the sense--must be read precisely as it should be in prose. The same principles of logical and emotional analysis, and the same lights and shades of vocal expression must be used. The distinctive ideas must be read with the same emphatic force and slides which individuate the important points in good prose speaking or reading. This will go far to break up the 'false gallop of verse,' and preserve the logical side of poetry....[29]

Three directions which Bailey forwards to those who are to read verse aloud are about the best and simplist. Bailey directed that poetry must be read with the natural speaking tones; that the ideas, the sense, must be made to stand out as distinctly as in prose; that the sense, with all its rhythmic changes, must be read in the 'metric time' of the standard measure and that, when this can not be done, the meter is poor, and may wisely be sacrificed to the sense.

Bailey tells the oral interpreter of verse to

> "keep in mind, above all, that this special study of the musical part of poetry is only one of many preparatory steps toward good poetic reading; that to this must be added all the elements of good prose reading; and that these elements, though mastered separately, can be fused, at last, into the living whole of eloquent prose or poetic expression only by the imagination and sympathy of the Reader."[30]

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[29] William T. Harris, The Fifth Reader, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1883) p. 266.

[30] Ibid., p. 312

The transition from the highly emotional sound and fury of the elocutionist to the thought-filled type of reading was a continual process taking place during the latter nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Recitation books with their rules and sentimental, humorous, and pathetic verse selections were still being published as late as nineteen-twenty. Yet, by that time, nineteen-twenty, the 'think-the-thought school for reading verse had good control of the oral interpretation field. The old mechanical elocutionists of the nineteenth century were on their way out of the speech field.

Where Mark Bailey left off Samuel Silas Curry began. In eighteen ninety five, Curry had his Lessons in Vocal Expression published in which he presented his prerequisites for good oral reading.

> Here then, are the fundamental requisites of reading and speaking, in accordance with the laws of nature and the human mind; impression must precede expression; the act of thinking must be accentuated; there must be developed the power to pause and hold the mind upon one idea until a conception arises so vivid as to create a response. True expression is primarily based upon this mental action.
>
> The first step that is required for the improvement of expression in accordance with these facts, is to take some simple extract, penetrating through the words to the successive ideas, and holding the mind upon one. When this has been given, then grasp another. The mind must take before it can give; thought and feeling must determine expression. Expression must be simply transparent thinking. To improve expression, therefore, thinking must be made stronger. No superficial rules, no aggregation of artificial tricks, can ever

> furnish substitutes for the living act of thought. The mind must step firmly from idea to idea, and lead another mind along its own road. Though images may be different in different minds, this progression of thinking is similar in all men. The fact that all minds think according to the same law, makes human language possible; and the accentuation of the rhythmic element of thinking makes expression effective.
>
> In reading extracts aloud, the aim at first must be not so much to read in a given way, as to think and enjoy, and to find the normal actions of the mind. Live in the enjoyment of one complete idea at a time, then give it, and so on, idea after idea.[31]

The ideas of reading verse with emphasis on the ideas, images, and meaning had been presented before Curry came upon the speech field. The natural interpretation of verse also had been forwarded previous to Curry's appearance. Curry did bring forth a new outlook to the oral interpretation field and that was his idea of the subjective aspect to the art of the oral interpretation of verse. He criticized the objective approach to oral reading held by the mechanical elocutionists. Curry felt that like music, vocal expression of verse was a manifestive art; that like this music, vocal expression of verse represents the object occasionally, and then as an additional association or suggestion. Curry wrote:

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[31] S. S. Curry, Lessons in Vocal Expression, (Boston: The Expression Co., 1895) pp. 21-23.

> Vocal Expression manifests the feeling in the man who observes the object, and centres in the man. The true function of Vocal Expression, therefore, is to manifest the effect of a true and adequate conception of a truth as directly and simply as possible. Words are symbolic, but the voice is suggestive; and when the voice is cramped and strained to imitate or represent something objective, it is not acting in its highest sphere, and the result is artificiality and weakness.
>
> One of the leading faults of Vocal Expression is that it is too objective. It is the most subjective aspect of art. Such subjective differences as are seen in the extract from Longfellow
>
> 'Sail forth into the sea, O Ship,
> Thou, too sail on, O Ship of State.'
>
> with reference to the three ships, should be studied and rendered with perseverance until the subjective transitions spontaneously modulate the voice and simply, directly, and truthfully reveal themselves. If Vocal Expression does not manifest such differences,--if it is made to represent objective things,--it loses its natural power to reveal such subjective differences, and becomes mere mechanical elocution. Instead of such an indirect method being weak, it is strongest, because it manifests the man.[32]

The practice of the elocutionists of setting up rules for the expression of different emotions tends to create an artificial situation. The reader must, instead of straining to represent differences, sympathetically identify himself with each idea and situation. Thus artificiality is avoided and true expression is attained.

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[32] Ibid., p. 53

Coming to the aid of Curry to help turn the tide against the elocutionists was Lee Emerson Bassett (1872). Bassett considers the expression of the thought as the first order of oral interpretation and he points out that appreciation and feeling will follow the expression of the thought. There appeared in the prefact to his A Handbook of Oral Reading a defense of his thesis that clear understanding is the basis of sane, convincing speech.

> The aim of this Handbook is to present, in as concise form as clearness permits, the principles of natural expressive reading aloud. The book is the outgrowth of several years of classroom instruction and practice based on the theory that effective oral expression is the result of clear thinking; that the principles underlying conversation, the most natural and unpremeditated form of speech, apply with equal force to the voicing of the thought of the printed page; and that the ability to read and speak with clearness and force comes, not from a knowledge of rules of speech, but with the education of mind, imagination, and emotions, and the devotion of one's best mental and spiritual energies to the task of communicating thought to other minds.
>
> If technical drill is given a prominent place in oral instruction, especially at the outset, the student is pretty sure to assume that the whole problem of expression is a matter of mere mechanical expertness in the use of voice, tongue, and lips. But natural and spontaneous expression is not secured in this way, as the artificialities of elocution of the past have demonstrated. The accurate utterance of words is largely a matter of imitation and mechanical skill, but like correctness in spelling, the accomplishment is incidental to the expression of thought. Furthermore, I have departed from the custom usually followed in texts on this subject, of laying first emphasis on the emotional values of selections studied. Clear understanding is the basis of sane, convincing speech. Appreciation and feeling follow the thought. The attempt

> to force or stimulate emotion about something not clearly understood is demoralizing to the student, and inevitably results in vain and arti-expression.[33]

Both Curry and Bassett considered the mechanical rules set forth by the over-emotionized elocutionists as not only useless, but harmful as well, when put to use in oral interpretation. They both were aware that too much gesturing is more harmful than too little and that over-emotionalism does little to help in the oral interpretation of verse. "Mechanical rules such as 'Pause before a preposition or a relative pronoun' and the like are useless. They are, moreover vicious because they concentrate the student's attention upon accidentals, and may prevent genuine thinking."[34]

> If technical drill is given a prominent place in oral instruction, especially at the outset, the student is pretty sure to assume that the whole problem of expression is a matter of mere mechanical expertness in the use of voice, tongue, and lips.
>
> There is a universal tendency to over-estimate gesture, in particular, representative or descriptive gesture, especially in modern English and American elocution. Only a little thought will show that gesture is the weakest form of expression, and representative gesture the weakest form of gesture.....
>
> No one should ever gesture for the sake of gesturing, or think it necessary to use movement in order to be expressive. The impulse must come first, and it will always come with

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[33] Lee Emerson Bassett, A Handbook of Oral Reading, (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1917) preface

[34] Curry, op. cit., p. 29

> true assimilation.....But too little gesture is better than too much. In fact, the making of too many gestures is a great hindrance to the development of true action. Chaotic motions are frequently more difficult to correct than lack of action.[35]

By nineteen-twenty authorities in the field of speech and oral interpretation all began to see and realized the favorable aspects to the philosophy held by Bailey, Curry, and Bassett. The transition from the elocutionary approach to the oral interpretation of verse to the 'think-the-thought' approach was about completed.

In 1923 Elsie Fogerty stated that:

> "Above all, we must throw away the horrible false tradition of "recitation," which stood self-condemned in that it never succeeded in interpreting anything but the worst, the most vulgar and meaningless of verse, because in that it could find room for the personal self-assertion which destroyed all true faculty of poetic interpretation."[36]

Regarding good oral reading Elsie Fogerty pointed out:

> "The greater part of the elaborate directions, "rules" and methods devised by teachers of "elocution to help speakers of verse, are nothing but attempts to find a substitute for true understanding and love of poetry and for natural taste and distinction in utterance.
>
> Those who need such rules are not ready to speak verse at all; they often attain worse and unendurable results in proportion as they are pedantic and exact in observing the rules they

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[35] Curry, op. cit., p. 278

[36] Elsie Fogerty, The Speaking of English Verse, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1923) p. x

> have been taught; as vulgar and pretentious people grow more unbearable when they affect a meticulous care for elegance.
>
> The more persuaded we are that poetry, like all art, is the result of a direct and spontaneous inspiration of the singer, that the poet is not fettered by the thousand rules of the metrist, that these are, in fact, rather deduced from the practice of the poet than imposed on him by authority, the more certain we become that as in colour, in music, in sculpture, the laws which the poet unconsciously obeys are not the outcome of ingenious devising, or of social convention, but are fundamentally connected with the essential laws of movement and of construction.
>
> It is only by a deeper understanding of the significance of rhythm that this synthesis can be effected.
>
> The creative force of the poet is his perception and love of beauty. The patterns he creates conform to a personal sense of laws only beginning to perceive, laws conditioned, as in all other art, by the nature of his medium. And that medium is speech, the speech which is his mother-tongue.
>
> It is then certain that there is no possible substitute for intelligence, significance and personal taste in the speaking of poetry; that an appreciation of content as well as form is essential; yet many scholars have been conspicuous by their inability to express a single line of verse adequately in utterance."[37]

As the aims, philosophy, and methods of the oral interpretation of verse changed so did the type of verse used for interpretive reading change. Whereas formerly selections were over-flowing with emotionalism, the new approach to reading verse brought a change to a more meaningful and intellectualized type of verse. Rational content was now a consideration, whereas previously, the

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[37] Ibid, p. 106

recitation books ignored it.

A. Tassin pointed up his dissatisfaction with the recitation books full of selections containing no thought and meaning when he said

> "up to this point I had already found reason for much dissatisfaction with the books of reading material I had been using. They were all full of oratorical, highly colored matter, sound and fury, but signifying little, phosphorescent without light or warmth. It was, however, when I came to insisting upon a summary as a test of accurate reading that I saw the greatest shortcoming of the usual material in the reading class. Its emotional content so far outweighed its rational content that there was almost nothing to summarize."[38]

William Parrish suggested that we

> "leave the drama to the course in acting. Let us leave narrative prose to the course in literature; it gains little by being read aloud. And let us leave the whole mass of third rate "literature" that clutters the recitation books, with all its sentimental absurdity and maudlin pathos, to the limbo of mediocrity where it properly belongs, and let us occupy ourselves with the best that the creative spirit of the English race has put into language---poetry suited to the cultural level of a true centre of learning."[39]

Through the use of the Quarterly Journal of Speech the elocutionists and their elocutionary rules were being attacked; the followers of Bailey, Curry, and Bassett were voicing their opinions in favor of the 'think-the-

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[38] A. Tassin, "Oral Reading as an Intelligence Test," Quarterly Journal of Speech, June, 1925. p. 258

[39] William Parrish, "Interpretative Reading," "Quarterly Journal of Speech, April, 1927. p. 168.

thought' philosophy. In regard to the oral interpretation of lyric poetry, Robert Hannah wrote:

> Accordingly, the reader's treatment of emotion must be genuine; unless sincerity be secured the interpreter cannot expect to arouse emotions in his hearers.....
> What is central in the poem should be central for the reader and each detail should be perceived in relation to the centre. In order to heighten his appreciation for the poem, the student should make a thorough analysis, seeing the details in relation to the central theme or idea. This is true in any art form. However, do not let us conclude our work with a mere analysis. I think that the teacher should do his utmost to develop the analytical powers of the student, stimulate him to penetrate to the very heart and soul of the poem itself.[40]

It was pointed out in the speech journal that "one reason for discrediting courses in elocution in former days was the emphasis put on emotionalism. The first thing thought of was the

> importance of emotional reaction and expression. Students recited Wolsey's farewell to Cromwell without knowing who Wolsey was or why he was brought low or said what he did to Cromwell by way of advice. And, if perchance they had heard of Oliver Cromwell, they thought the Cromwell who shed tears when Wolsey spoke was the great Oliver himself. But the piece offered fine chances for emotional wallowing and pretense for vocality and gesture. Such recitations were to be witnessed, not experienced. They were exhibitions, not interpretations. But there is no justification in educational work for mere emotionalism and gesticulation in and for themselves.
> In the degree that our courses in oral interpretation are substantial in content, offer

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[40] Robert Hannah, "The Oral Interpretation of Lyric Poetry," Quarterly Journal of Speech, June, 1929 p. 374.

> exacting discipline in clear thinking, interpretative thinking, truthful thinking, open the way to understanding and appreciation of spiritual things, and stand for honest, unaffected and unpretentious utterance, they are adapted, so it seems to me, to the expectation and the exactions of the academic mind and are potent factions in building up our student the attitude of mind which we may call academic."[41]
>
> Elocutionary "haranguing" and highly colored vocalization was no longer to be a part of the oral interpretation of verse, for it was now felt that "sincerity and simplicity must prevail or there is no communication. The actor who 'tears a passion to tatters,' the speaker who prizes rhetorical ornament above honest desire to share an idea, the reader who takes occasion to parade his elocutionary accomplishments, beclouds the message his words should carry and reveals nothing but his own conceit and stupidity."[42]

The new philosophy behind oral interpretation brought about the need of compiling verse selections that contained thought and meaning; the recitation books of eighteen hundreds full of "cratorical, highly colored matter, sound and fury, but signifying little, phosphorescent without light or warmth"[43] were no longer of any use to readers who were now concerned, not with putting on an exhibition, but with interpretation.

The poems of Percy Shelley, which hardly ever appeared in the recitation books of the elocutionists, by

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[41] L. E. Bassett, "Adopting Courses in Interpretation to the Academic Mind," Quarterly Journal of Speech, April, 1932. p. 175.

[42] Lawrence B. Goodrich, "The Illusion of Real Talk," Quarterly Journal of Speech, February, 1933. p. 39

[43] A. Tassin, "Oral Reading as an Intelligence Test," Quarterly Journal of Speech, June, 1925. p. 258.

1925 were appearing in the oral interpretation books. The same applies to the poems written by William Wordsworth. The verse of James Whitcomb Riley no longer was to infest the reading books. In 1930 a poetry reading program was given at Smith College and the choice of selections in and of themselves showed the success of the transition from the elocutionary method of reading to the 'think-the-thought' approach.

> "Inevitably there was, fairly early on the program as it happened, a good example of the elocutionary methods of former days: overdone gestures and facial expression, consciousness of self at every moment, two poems of contrasting mood and tempo chosen apparently to exhibit the reader's virtuousity rather than for any affinity of their own. But the young lady was the sole representative of the misuses of poetry."[44]

Following is the program presented:

Part I

1. Smith College
   Steel — Joseph Anslander
   Ruth H. Scannell
2. Wells College
   The Golden Falcon — Robert Coffin
   Three Quatrains — Edwin A. Robinson
   Two Lyrics — Emily Dickenson
   Most Sacred Mountains — Eunice Tietjens
   Catharine Cleland Davis
3. Darthmouth College
   Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam — Edward Fitzgerald
   C. R. Chase

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[44] H. A. Wichelns, "The Undergraduate Reads from the Poets," Quarterly Journal of Speech, November, 1930 p. 454.

4. Rhode Island College of Education
   - Cupid and Campaspe — John Lyly
   - Go, Lonely Rose — Edmund Waller
   - Ozymandias — Percy Shelley
   - Mariana — Alfred, Lord Tennyson
   - Opportunity — Edward Rowland Sill

   Claire M. Mckenna

5. Connecticut College
   - Ulysses — Alfred, Lord Tennyson

   Margaret Leland

6. Radcliffe College
   - The Chinese Nightengale — Vachel Lindsay

   Tonita Orena

7. Russell Sage College
   - Lyrics — Alice Meyell
   - Lyrics — Edna St. V. Millay

   Caroline Comstock

8. Harvard University
   - The Explorer — Rudyard Kipling

   Robert Haydon Jones

Part II

1. Mt. Holyoke College
   - Judas Iscariot — Countee Cullen

   Sadie G. Johnson

2. Wesleyan University
   - The Road Not Taken — Robert Frost
   - Spring Pools
   - Once by the Pacific
   - The Bear
   - Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

   John A. Kouwenhover

3. New Jersey College for Women
   - The Forsaken Merman — Matthew Arnold

   Marim L. Turner

4. Hunter College
   - Guenevere — Sara Teasdale
   - Joy

   Marion Millstein

5. Amherst College
   - Andrea del Sarto — Robert Browning

   Richard G. Gettell

6. Pembroke, Brown University
   - The Hill Wife — Robert Frost
   - Out-Out

   Elizabeth Considine

7. Princeton University
   Ode to the West Wind — Percy Shelley
   Dover Beach — Matthew Arnold
   Danial E. Walzer

8. Wellesley College
   The Ballad of the Harp Weaver — Edna St. V. Millay
   Ballad of the Rag-bad Heart — Margorie Sieffert
   Ballad of the Wistful Lady
   Ballad of the Hurdy Gurdy
   Natalie M. Burggraf

This program of poetry reading, the third that has been arranged by Mt. Holyoke and Smith, is given under the auspices of the Vox Club of Smith.[45]

The recitation books and the books containing poems for oral interpretation after 1920 contained very few, if any, of the verse selections presented in the recitation books published in the nineteenth century. Selections by John Masefield, Louis Untermeyer, Robert Frost, Edwin Markham, John Gould Fletcher, Joyce Kilmer, Alfred Noyes, Thomas Hardy, and Percy Shelley began to fill the books containing verse selections for oral interpretation.[46] It is to be noted that the verse of Shelley and Hardy were available but were not included in the recitation books of the elocutionists; the reason being that the verse of these poets was not appropriate for the "wallowing and haranguing" of the elocutionists. The selections contained in the recent compilations of verse for oral in-

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[45] Ibid., p. 454

[46] Edwin DuBois Shurter and Dwight Everett Watkins, Poems for Oral Interpretation, (New York: Noble and Noble, 1925) 264 pp.

terpretation are not appropriate for over-emotionalized gesturing and vocalization such as practiced by the mechanical and overruled elocutionists. Today such exhibitions such as those performed by the elocutionists is labeled impersonation and not interpretation.

> "In interpretation, there is a balance of communicativeness and projection,--an interplay of the two. Impersonation is more indirect and involves a more complete characterization; that is, the impersonator uses more facial expression and bodily gesture and exercises greater liberty in moving about the platform.....We should never speak of the impersonation of a poem."[47]

This is a distinction which the elocutionists did not make. Their overuse of facial expression, bodily gesture, and emotionalized vocalizations made their exhibitions more a matter of impersonation than interpretation.

Today the oral interpreter of verse is concerned with so many aspects of oral interpretation which the elocutionists did not consider. Communication, analysis, criticism, meaning, language were of no concern to the elocutionists interpreting verse.

Woolbert and Nelsen in discussing the problems involved in interpretation point out that the problems of the interpreter are:

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[47] Charles H. Woolbert and Severina E. Nelson, The Art of Interpretative Speech, (New York: F. S. Crofts & Company, 1946) p. 2

1. How can I, the interpreter, find the meaning of the printed page?

2. How can I, the interpreter, give expression to this meaning and thereby induce someone else to appreciate my interpretation?

The Art of Interpretive Speech states that there are two types of facts that must be mastered before successful interpretation can be secured:

> (1) information about the author, his plans and purposes, his mood and temper; and (2) the meaning of the ideas, words, phrases, and sentences in his composition.[48]

It is to be noted that none of these aspects of oral reading were stressed to the oral interpreter of verse prior to 1900. Today the oral interpreter of verse should know something of the function of these aspects to oral reading. The presentation of W. H. Auden's The Age of Anxiety by the speech department at the University of California necessitated the consideration of meaning, communication, analysis, and criticism. The meaning was of the utmost importance and that meaning could in no way be communicated with the use of the rules of the elocutionists. The Age of Anxiety presents a story:

> "In a Third Avenue bar in New York City, four people sit, each alone in his own personal world. The clerk sees himself re-

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[48] Woolbert, Chas. H. and Nelson, Servina A., The Art of Interpretative Speech, (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1946) p. 8

flected in the mirror and tries to laugh at himself and be amused; the scientist studies the bubbles in his glass and impersonally thinks of man and his stupidity; the Jewish girl dreams of having a home like 'theirs'--of belonging; the flier hopes to find the answers to his insecurity in the persons around him who seem to have adjusted themselves, as far as he can see.

The radio, with its news of the war, distracts their thoughts from themselves and they become acquainted together, they continue the search for meaning by discussing what they know or can remember of human life. This attempt to understand through the intellectual investigation proves only that the seven ages of man end in senescence and death and that nothing beyond this can be known by man. Then in an attempt to go beyond the limits of such a factual description, they enter the realm of the imagination to see what an investigation of symbol and vision can lend to their understanding. This takes the form of a dream journey,but at last they are stopped in their approach to the final stage by a desert beyond which they cannot go even in imagination. The search for the final realization must remain unanswered in this life.

Rosetta invites the three men to her apartment for sandwiches and a nightcap. In contrast to the frustration they have known, they all think they are finding something of value and significance in the attraction the flier and the girl feel for each other; but the illusion of love does not promise the answers they hoped for and the love is not consumated. The boy escapes his problem temporarily by 'passing out'; the girl rises to an understanding that permits her to abandon her illusion and accept reality--and her lost faith; the clerk continues his lonely, jeering, agnostic way; the scientist realizes that man must 'wait unaware for his world to come.' There is continuing frustration, but two have an affirming faith in ultimate mercy to help them meet the world as it is."

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[49] William B. McCord, "An Interpretation of the Times," Quarterly Journal of Speech, December, 1949. p. 489

A selection such as The Age of Anxiety would have no doubt frustrated the elocutionist to no end. In a verse selection of this nature there is no place for superficial mechanical rules for vocal outbursts and gesture. Thought, meaning, and feeling determine expression; and thought is the dominant characteristic to be considered in such a selection which presents a tragedy of an era. In this verse selection, Auden

> "skillfully creates an analysis of the present with its vulgarity, laughter, mockery, bitterness, flippancy, anxiety, compassion, and reverence,--the incongruous ingredients of modern man. There are those who wish they could resign from the human race; others try to ignore the whole thing,--with equal indifference to a day of doom or a day of salvation. Some few have found a basis for hope. Auden, though acutely aware of complexity and confusion, belongs with the latter group. It is not, however, a position of calm, peaceful meditation. Dan S. Norton, in the 'Virginia Quarterly Review, has suggestively pictured the differences between Auden and Eliot: "Auden is in the middle of the arena riding a widly bucking horse, whereas Eliot, on the sidelines, has just completed the examination of his horse's broken leg and has shot the animal neatly through the head."[50]

Today the oral interpreter of verse is told to

> "Read with your wits and reference books about you--that is the simplest and most direct advice. The alertness demanded of the critical reader is comparable to the

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[50] Ibid., p. 489.

> to the reporter's nose for news, the detective's investigative sense, the researcher's keen insights. The interpreter of this sort will add sensitiveness and imagination to eagerness and perseverence. The printed poem will challange him to bring his best intelligence to bear upon it and to play about it, and he will be satisfied with nothing less than what seems to him to be the very experience of the poet."[51]

Selections by Walt Whitman, T. S. Eliot, Archibald MacLeish, Ezra Pound, and other modern versifiers will make it necessary for the oral interpreter of verse to make use of the foregoing suggestions.

The very fact that poetry is being recorded today in itself points out that the gesturing, facial expressions, and other aspects of the elocutionary school of reading are not necessary for the good oral interpretation of verse. When the reader of verse makes a recording, the only mean he has to communicate the thought and emotion is his voice. Poetry recordings have been made by Robinson Jeffers, James Weldon Johnson, Archibald MacLeish, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Walter de la Mare, Robert Frost, E.E. Cummings, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Vachel Lindsay, Robert P. Tristram Coffin, John Holmes, and other poets reading their own verse. There are also those verse recordings made by those who interpret the poetry of others. In-

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[51] Charles W. Cooper, Preface to Poetry, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946) p. 666.

cluded in this catagory there are Marjorie Gullan, Norman Corwin, Basil Rathbone, Clifford Turner, Lawell Cartwright, Cornelia Otis Skinner, J. R. Firth and others.

The Hollow Men, The Man with the Hoe, Congo, Denver Beach, Birches, Mending Wall, Evening Meal in the Twentieth Century, Love Like Law, The Coast-Road, Gerontion, The Tiger, On His Blindness, Ode to the West Wind, America Was Promises, Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City, are all available on record. Not the differences between these selections and those to be found in Werner's Readings and Recitations or Shoemaker's Best Selections, especially the difference in logical content, meaning, and rhythm. Verse recordings are available through Musicraft, Colombia, Victor, The Linguaphone Institute, and Harvard Film Service.[52]

It is impressed on the oral interpreter of verse today not to "tra-la-la it (poetry) monotonously, but suit the "music" to the meaning."[53]

The aim of the oral reader of verse today is to "achieve an experience as nearly like that of the poet as you can, and you must not forget that the poem on the page is the link between the two." The oral reader of

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[52] The Linguaphone Institute, 92 RCA Building, New York 20, New York.
Harvard Film Service, 4 Lawrence Hall, Cambridge 38, Mass.

[53] Cooper, Charles W., Preface to Poetry, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943) p. 7

verse was not told of these aspects of reading verse until 1920. "Interpretation," the oral interpreter is told today, "should veam carrying over richness of meaning from the printed page to the eyes and ears of the listeners... To accomplish these ends does not usually demand great histrionic display, vocal gymnastics, or rare impersonative technique."[54]

"The interpreter who insists on galloping all over the stage trying to assume the positions of five men and two women certainly should be rewarded for his unusual acrobatic feat, but should not expect a share in the admiration of interpreters who like sincerity and purposeful meaning rather than gymnastics and contortions and slapstick maneuvers."[55]

"The day is passing, we hope," state Woolbert and Nelson, "for the costumed interpreter, the musically minded interpreter who improvises at the piano as he pours out a "reading" of Trees, or the co-ed who waltzes all over the stage as she gasps out Dorothy Parker's The Waltz."[56]

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[54] Ibid., p. 24

[55] Woolbert, Charles H., and Nelson, Severina E., The Art of Interpretative Speech, (New York: F. S. Crofts & Company, 1946) p. 6

[56] Woolbert and Nelson, loc. cit.

CHAPTER IV

Summary

Although any historical study of this type, by its very nature, is complete within itself, it is felt that certain conclusions may be derived from the study.

The type of verse presented for oral interpretation has indeed changed since the time of the elocutionists. The philosophy of the readers of verse in the nineteenth century, that is, the stressing of emotionalism, has changed to a philosophy prevelant today stressing meaning and thought. The rules of the elocutionists have been discarded today by the interpreters of verse and the method of reading verse is now a mere natural one.

This study has also brought out the fact that the 'natural' and 'stress on thought and meaning' approach to reading verse was presented long before the time of S. S. Curry. It has been found that the nineteenth century reader of verse was not concerned, as is the oral interpreter today, with the communication of thought; the aim of the elocutionary reader was an emotional response and how he attained it mattered not, with or without the use of meaning and thought.

These changes have made oral interpretation of verse a matter of clear and critical learning. It is

no longer an aspect of education to be looked down upon, for the subject of oral interpretation of verse can be properly called academic. L. E. Bassett points out:

> In the degree that our courses in oral interpretation are substantial in content, offer exacting discipline in clear thinking, interpretative thinking, truthful thinking, open the way to understanding and appreciation of spiritual things, and stand for honest, unaffected and unpretentious utterance, they are adapted, so it seems to me, to the expectation and the exactions of the academic mind and are potent factions in building up our student the attitude of mind which we may call academic.[57]

Oral interpretation is no longer a thing for 'strong men to flee from screaming.'

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[57] L. E. Bassett, "Adopting Courses in Interpretation to the Academic Mind," Quarterly Journal of Speech, April, 1932, p. 175.

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